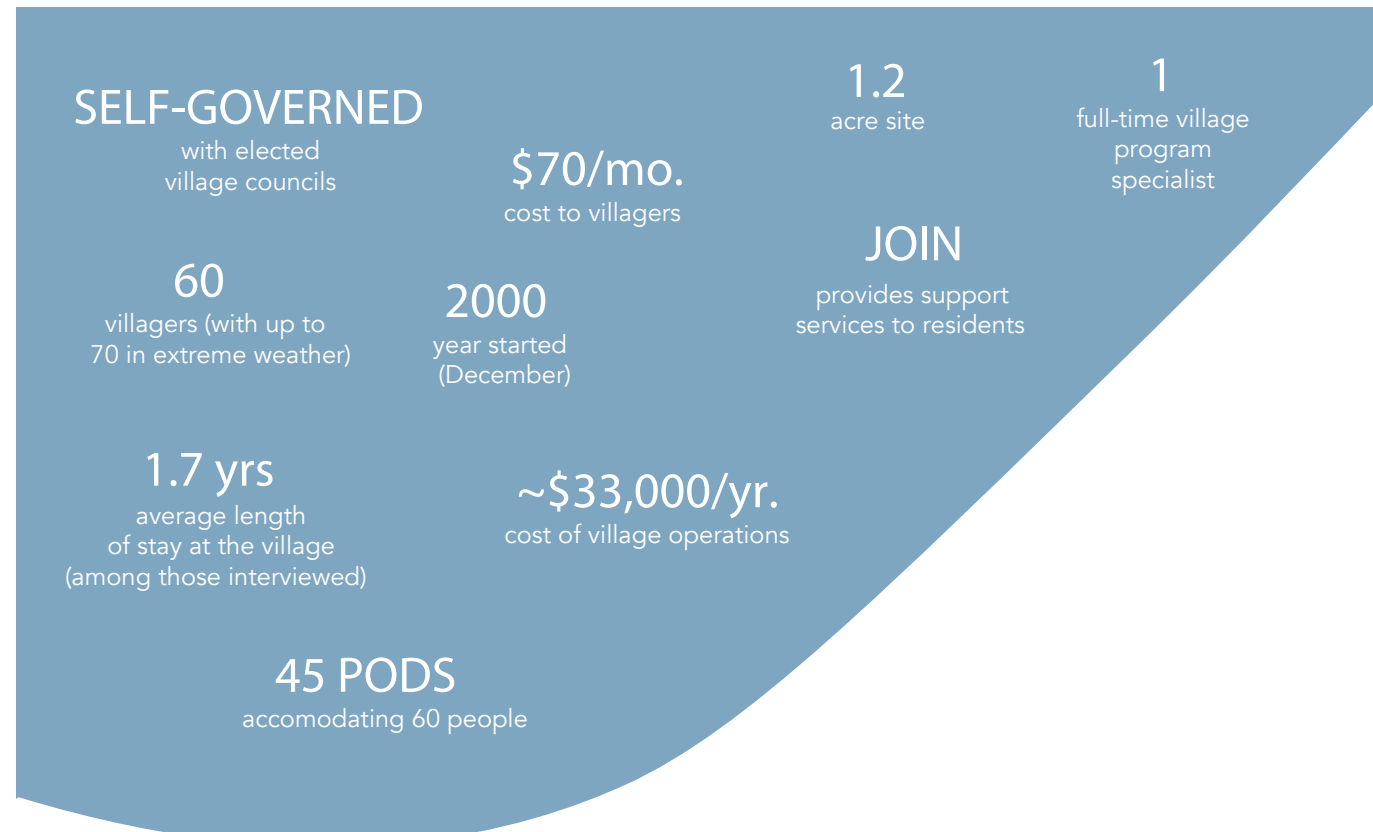




Dignity Village

Image credit: Mark Lakeman



Dignity Village

[Village Profile]

Dignity Village is the oldest and longest running tiny house (or pod) village in the country, established in 2000. It is a self-governed community that is home to about 60 villagers at any given time, and has helped countless other individuals experiencing homelessness over the years. From aesthetic and governance concepts, to the application of the term village to this context, Dignity Village provided an example of a new form of alternative shelter that still informs activism, advocacy, and shelter responses in Portland and around the country. Critically, it was created by people experiencing homelessness, with support from allies ranging from designers and developers to preachers and artists.

Dignity Village's origins are rooted in creative activism sparked by the "Out of Doorways" campaign initiated by the nonprofit and weekly street newspaper Street Roots following a legal ruling to end camping bans in Portland. The campaign called for the establishment of a sanctioned "tent city" in response to a lack of shelter in the city. A small group of houseless activists including Ibrahim Mubarak and Jack Tafari set up Camp Dignity next to the Broadway Bridge in late

2000. This action set off the first of several stand-offs with police that forced them to move. The group highlighted this displacement through a "shopping cart parade," in which they moved together with their belongings through the city to a new site as they also attracted new members to their community. Through a series of moves to locations by the Willamette River and city bridges and subsequent parades following their removal, they gained local and national attention. These activists brought the issue of "sweeps" to the forefront, and demonstrated that people were being displaced with nowhere else to go.

With this increased attention and newly found support from Portlanders eager to assist their efforts, the group was able to establish Camp Dignity under the Fremont Bridge, hosting a safe space for around 80 people in tents for 9 months. During this time, the group and allies planned for next steps and worked on establishing a vision for what an intentional community might look like. As they planned for this community using possibilities like Dignity City and Dignity Town, they landed on the name Dignity Village to communicate a level of aspiration

“Once on the current site, we reached habitation at the village immediately through tents on pallets...I started to build this thing in the center with interesting notable characters from Portland’s culture showing up in a big push to build this community building in the middle, which took the form of a big donut with a perimeter of doors, but tilted and cut to receive sunlight and fill the space with warmth passively. So, that was the initial structure interpenetrated by our tower just to create a community space out of the wind and rain. And then once we started this construction phase, we gathered mountains of reclaimed materials and other people showed up with tools to help. I would say we built for five years straight. There were all these different parts and pieces and initiatives, but the village literally built itself from almost nothing. And this is one of the most wonderful things about it. And when people ask me, “What will it take to do a village?” I’m like, “Well, it’s between zero and the highest imaginable number, but it’s possible to do this.”

- Mark Lakeman, Architect and Dignity Village Co-Designer

that went far beyond basic shelter. This coincided with the creation of The City Repair Project and its founders’ advocacy for revitalizing neighborhoods for community and environmental health.

In preparation for establishing a more permanent community, the group formed Dignity Village as a certified 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Camp Dignity split into 3 groups, with one group “temporarily” moving onto city-owned land in the Sunderland neighborhood while a more long-term site could be identified. This site was the only one of the three Camp Dignity factions that persisted, and with the help of local architects, builders, and volunteers, established itself as a

community with individual sleeping pods, gardens, and gathering structures.

In its early years the village faced ongoing threats of displacement, but persisted each time with support from allies. It was entirely self-funded, with site costs covered by the Larson Legacy in the early years (essentially renting the land from the City). Some of its early organizers note that a turning point for the village was when a local right wing radio personality contacted the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals in part of a public campaign to shut down the village. Rather than resulting in the displacement of the village, it ultimately forced those in the city who were quietly supporting the village to publicly ad-

vocate for the village, with activists and bureau representatives galvanized by a shared distaste for the bullying attempts. As a result, in 2004 the Portland City Council granted campground status to the village, making it the country’s first city-sanctioned village and creating the structural mechanisms for this type of community to legally exist in the city.

The campground designation of the village opened up a lot of opportunities for the types of structures and amenities that could support the village. The main rules given to the designers and organizers supporting the village, like architect Mark Lakeman and developer Eli Spevak, were to not create structures that were code compliant to standard building typology (so as not to trigger build-



Displacement of Camp Dignity & Organizing for Shopping Cart Parade

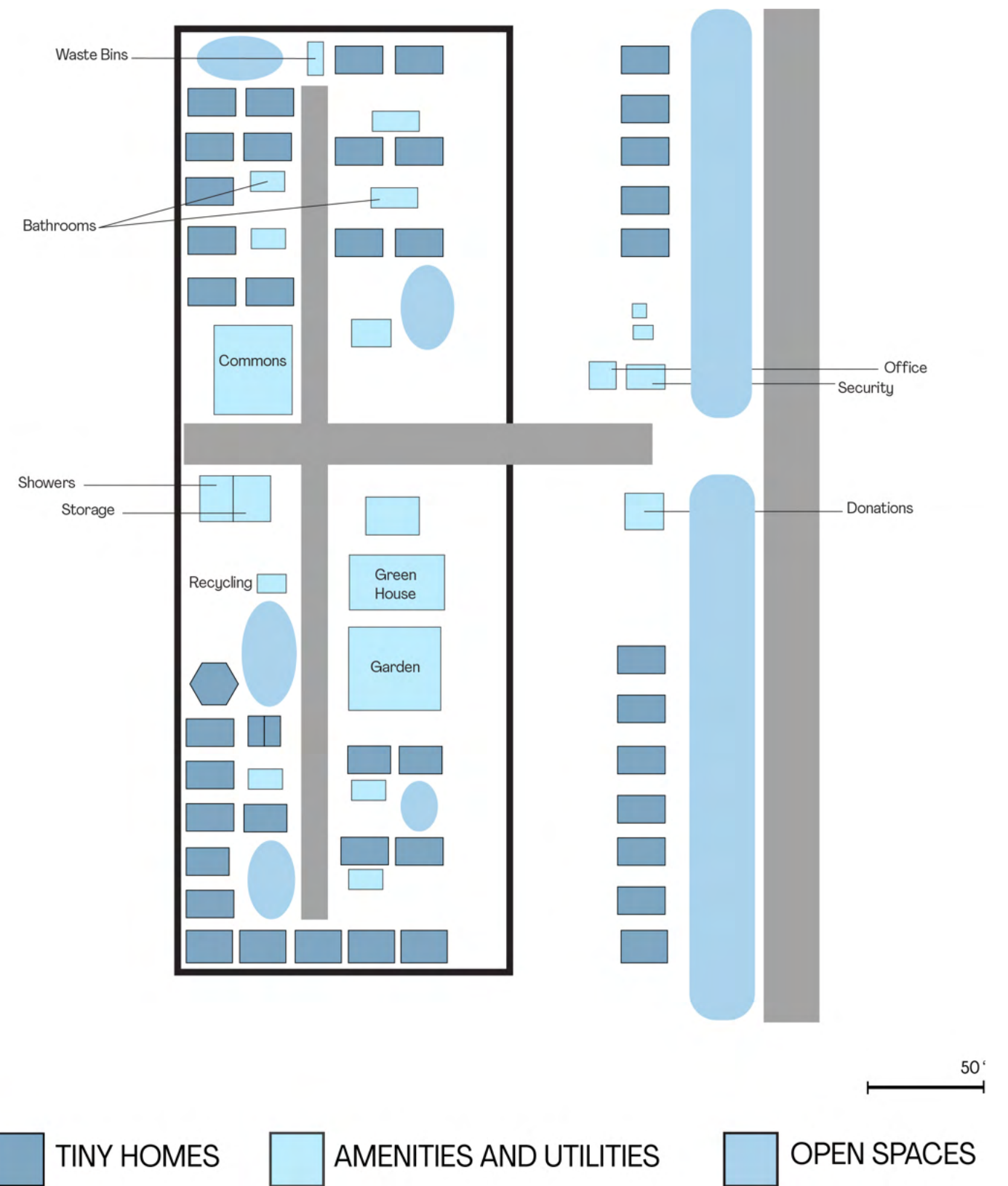
Image credit: Mark Lakeman

ing codes), and the structures needed to be movable. What constitutes movable is a big question (with some savvy villagers noting that forklifts exist that are capable of moving pretty massive objects), but the mandate to keep structures outside of building code required keeping the pods modest in size, with pods ranging in size between 96 and 240 square feet.

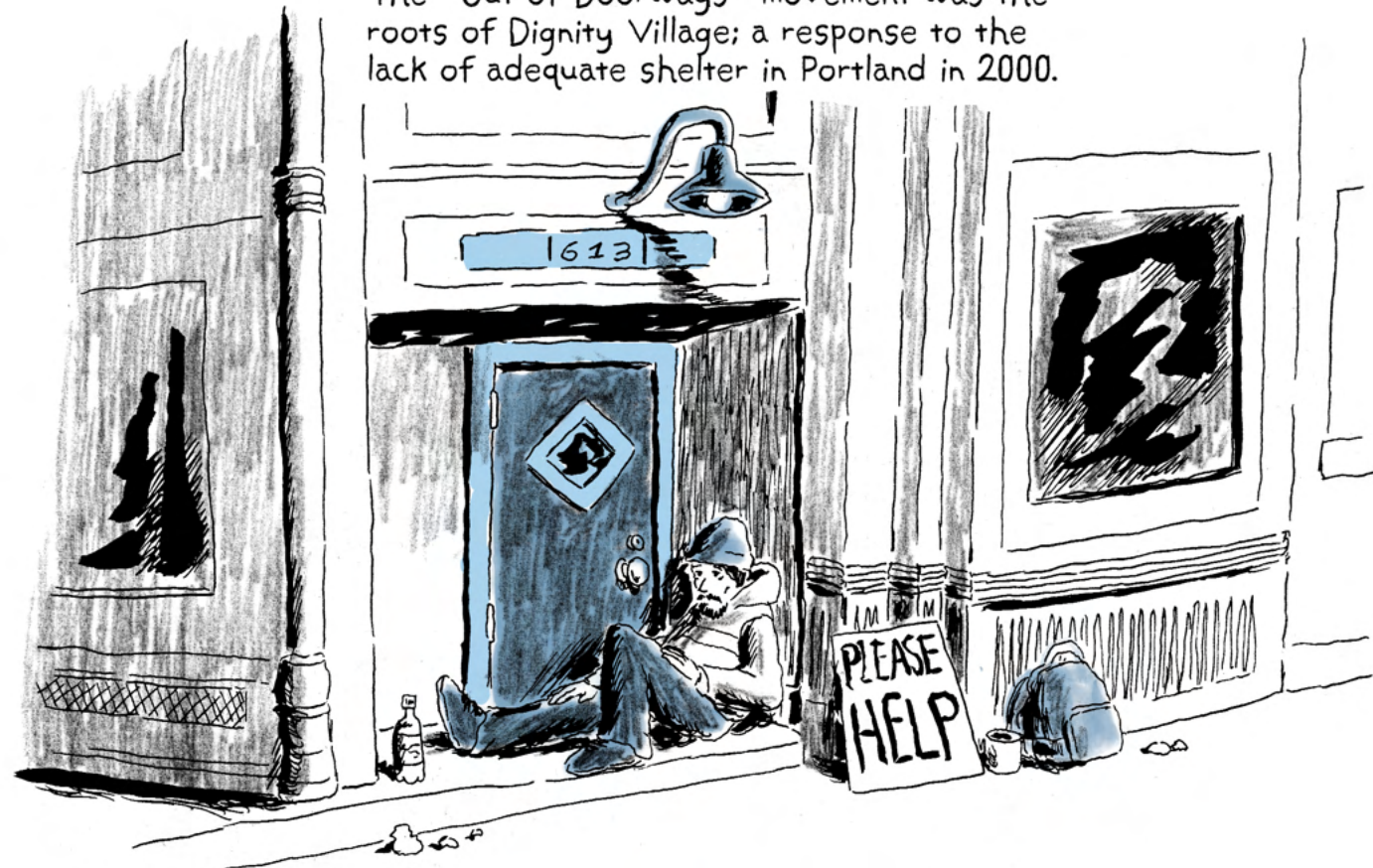
Concepts of democratic self-governance were baked into the village by its founders, and Dignity Village still runs as a self-governed village today. Site utilities are limited, with portable toilets, limited electricity, and propane canisters serving as a power source for pod heat, cooking, and water heaters, but the village remains largely self-reliant. Monthly dues for villagers (around \$70/mo.) cover the village's costs of approximately \$33,000 per year. The village has had a full-time Program Support Specialist from non-profit JOIN since 2014, funded from outside sources. This position was originally created to help support the village with some of its struggles to meet its contractual obligations with the City. The Program Support Specialist has evolved to help provide connections to resources and offer neutral recommendations on everything from nonprofit operations to conflict resolution. The position has influence but no vote in village decisions in the interest of supporting villager agency and maintaining trust with villagers. The Program Support Specialist plays a key role as a village advocate and liaison in handling external conflict, such as political, social, or bureaucratic threats to the village.

The nature of the village's location makes it unlikely for one to stumble across the site, with neighbors including a yard waste recycling facility, a prison, a country club, and the outer runways of the Portland airport. This remoteness has surely contributed to the village's longevity, with political pressures from neighbors of other burgeoning villages nearly always resulting in displacement. The isolated site does come with challenges, and cars are required by many villagers since nearly half of villagers have jobs outside the village.

Dignity Village continues to serve as a model for self-governed villages and alternative shelter. Some of the founding members of Dignity Village went on to advocate for the village model in other places and advocate for other models of shelter and services for people experiencing homelessness. Notably, Dignity Village co-founder Ibrahim Mubarak co-founded the houseless advocacy non-profit Right 2 Survive and co-founded the innovative "rest area" model of Right 2 Dream Too. Individuals that found their footing at Dignity Village after experiencing homelessness went on to form new communities and advocate for villages, including many of the founders of the Village Coalition and Hazelnut Grove, which helped usher in a new period of village creation in Portland informed by Dignity Village's principles and community won through years of activism.



The "Out of Doorways" movement was the roots of Dignity Village; a response to the lack of adequate shelter in Portland in 2000.



This sparked a cycle: a series of displacements met with a series of activist parades.



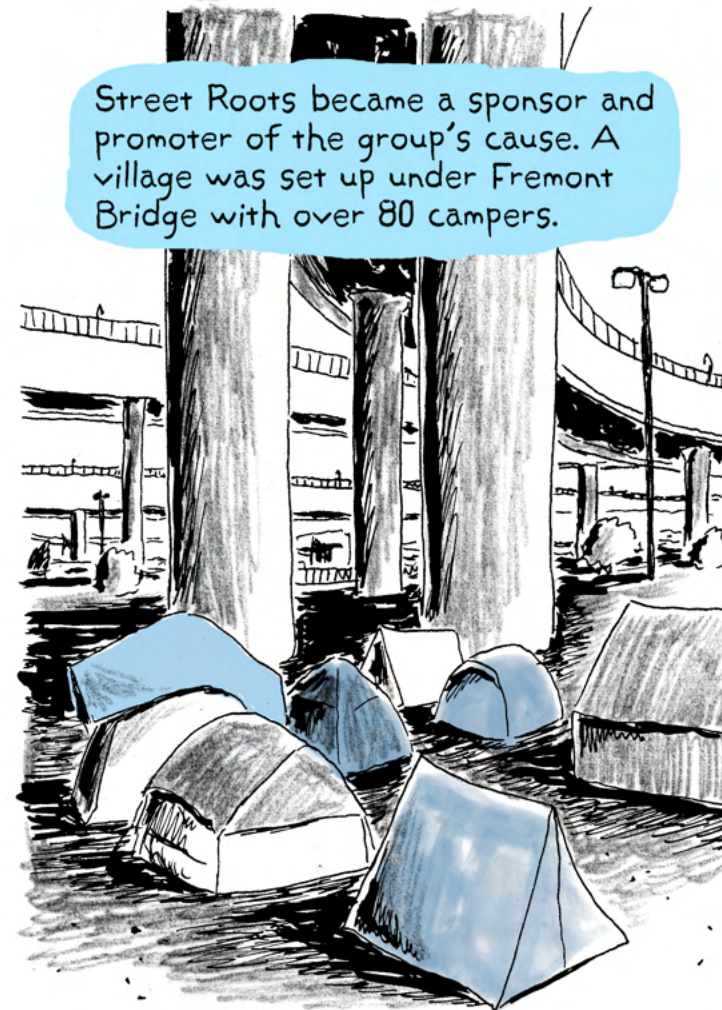
The first Camp Dignity was set up by eight houseless activists, but it was soon broken up by police.



The activists staged a shopping cart parade through Portland to highlight the shelter crisis.



Street Roots became a sponsor and promoter of the group's cause. A village was set up under Fremont Bridge with over 80 campers.



Dignity Village became a certified 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and in 2004 became Portland's first city-sanctioned tiny house village. It is considered by many to be the longest-running village of its kind, and it has inspired similar villages across the country and internationally.

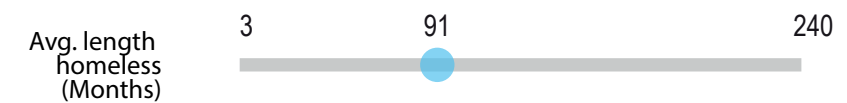
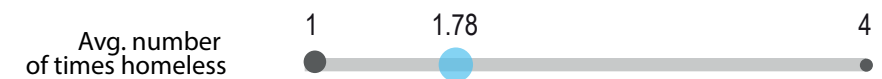
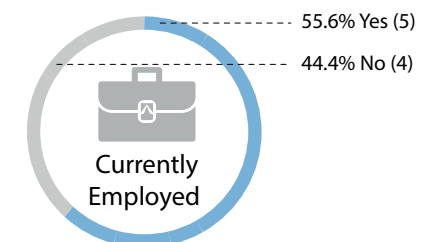
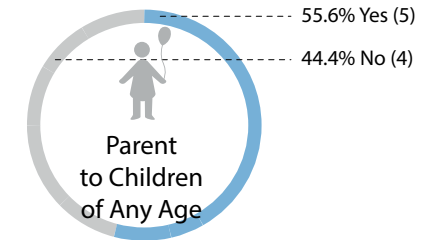
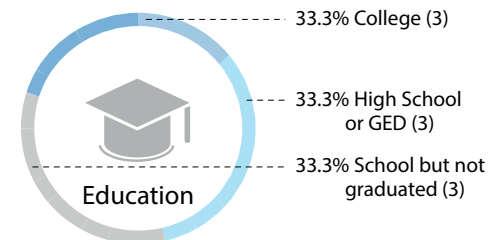
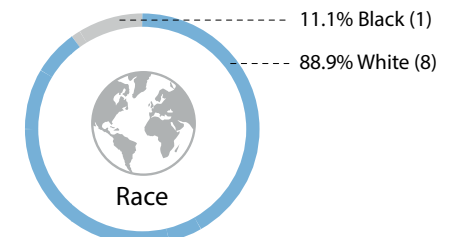
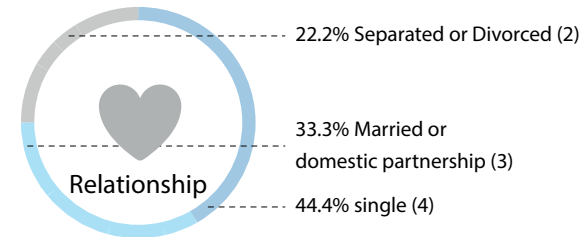
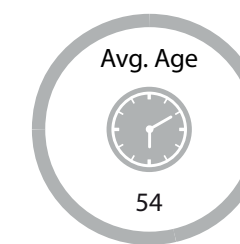
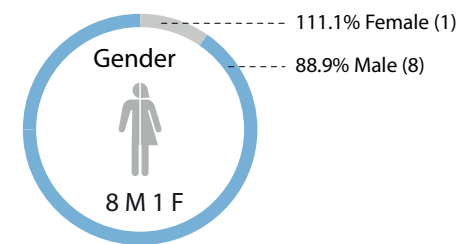


Dignity Village

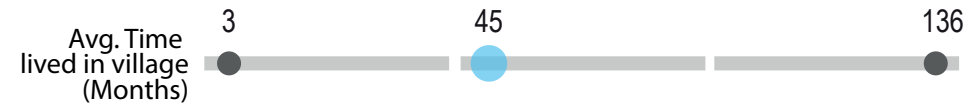
[Villager Interview Results]

At each village, all current villagers were invited to participate in a survey and interview. The findings in the following pages represent only those villagers who elected to participate and not the entire population of the village.

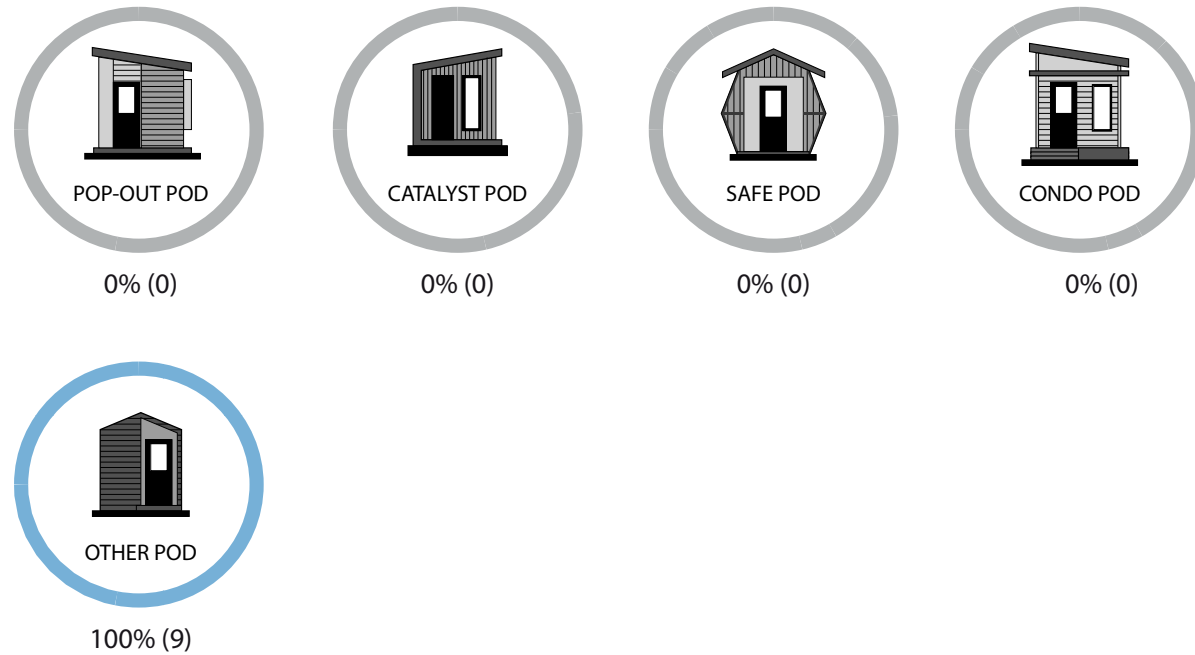
RESIDENTS DEMOGRAPHICS



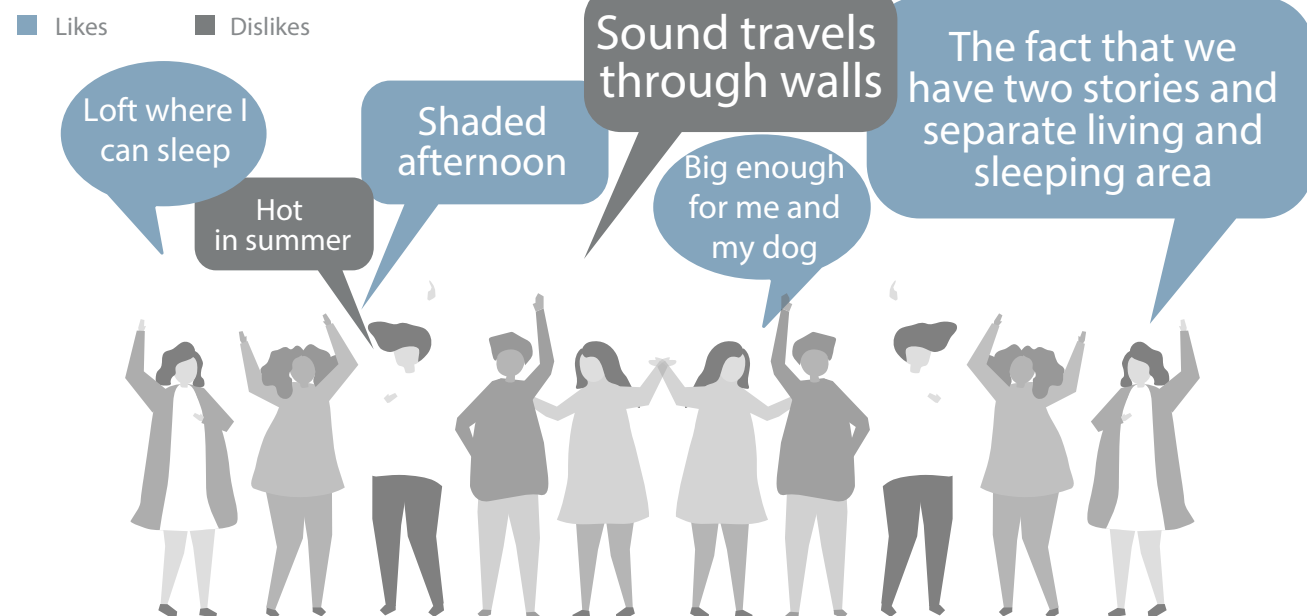
RESIDENCE AT VILLAGE



PODS POD TYPE



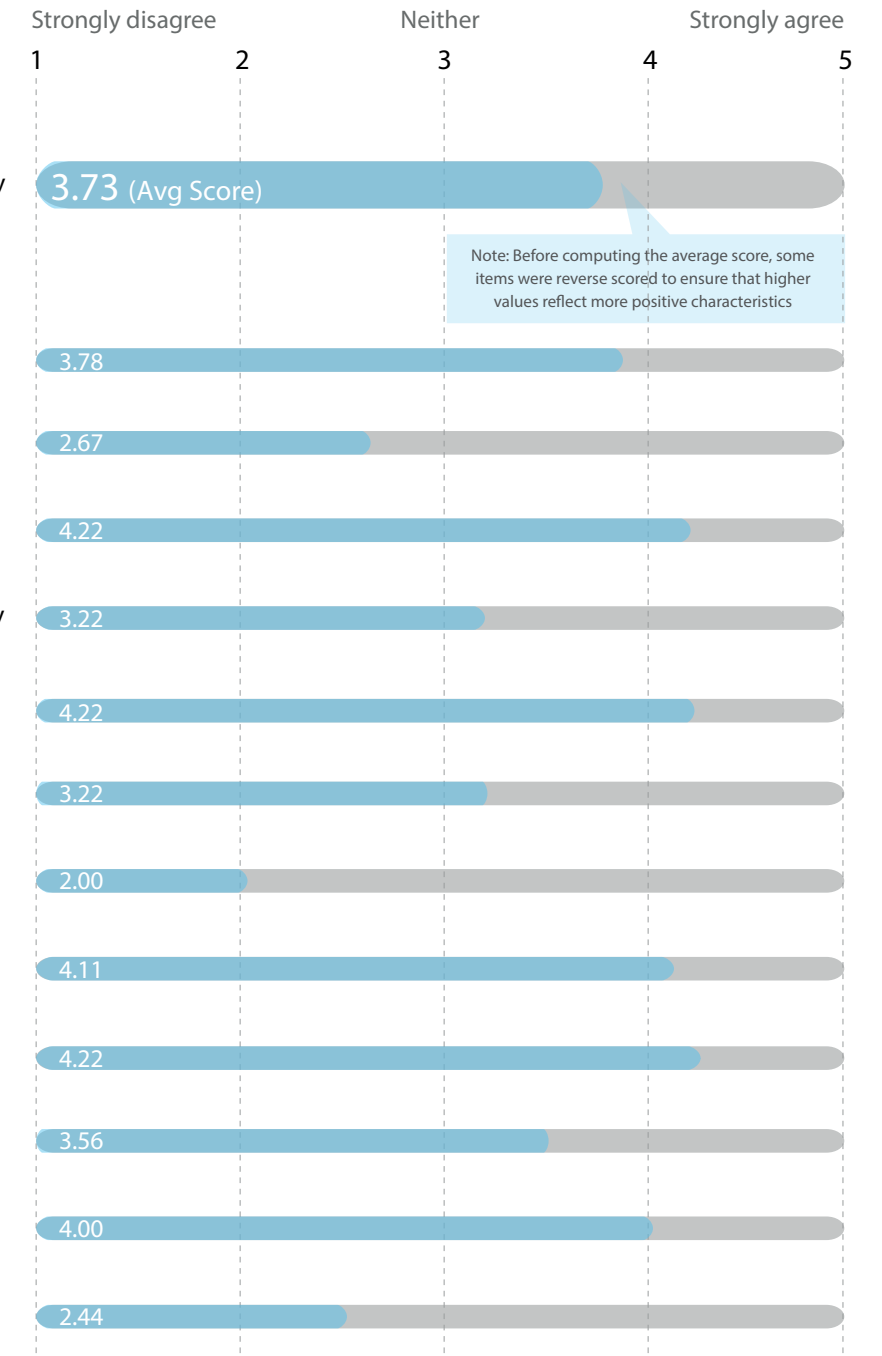
POD DESCRIPTION, LIKES & DISLIKES



POD QUALITY



Pod Quality



VILLAGE
VILLAGE SOCIAL CLIMATE



Village Social Climate

Strongly disagree Neither Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5

4.19 (Avg Score)

Note: Before computing the average score, some items were reverse scored to ensure that higher values reflect more positive characteristics

1. I feel like part of this village, like I belong here.

4.33

2. I know the rules in this village, and I can fit in with them.

4.00

3. I feel safe in the village.

4.78

4. Sometimes I feel unwelcome in the village because of my ethnicity and my cultural background.

2.11

5. There are other aspects of who I am that make me feel unwelcome in the village

2.00

6. People in the village are friendly to everybody no matter what the person's skin color or ethnic

4.11

7. People in my village treat me as an equal.

4.22

VILLAGE SENSE OF
COMMUNITY



Village Sense of Community

Strongly disagree Neither Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5

3.59 (Avg Score)

Note: Before computing the average score, some items were reverse scored to ensure that higher values reflect more positive characteristics

1. I think this village is a good place for me to live

4.33

2. Other residents and I want the same things from the village

3.33

3. I feel at home in the village

4.00

4. I care about what other villagers think of my actions

3.33

5. I have no influence over what this village is like

2.33

6. If there is a problem in the village people who live there can get it solve

3.33

7. I feel a strong sense of community in this village

3.56

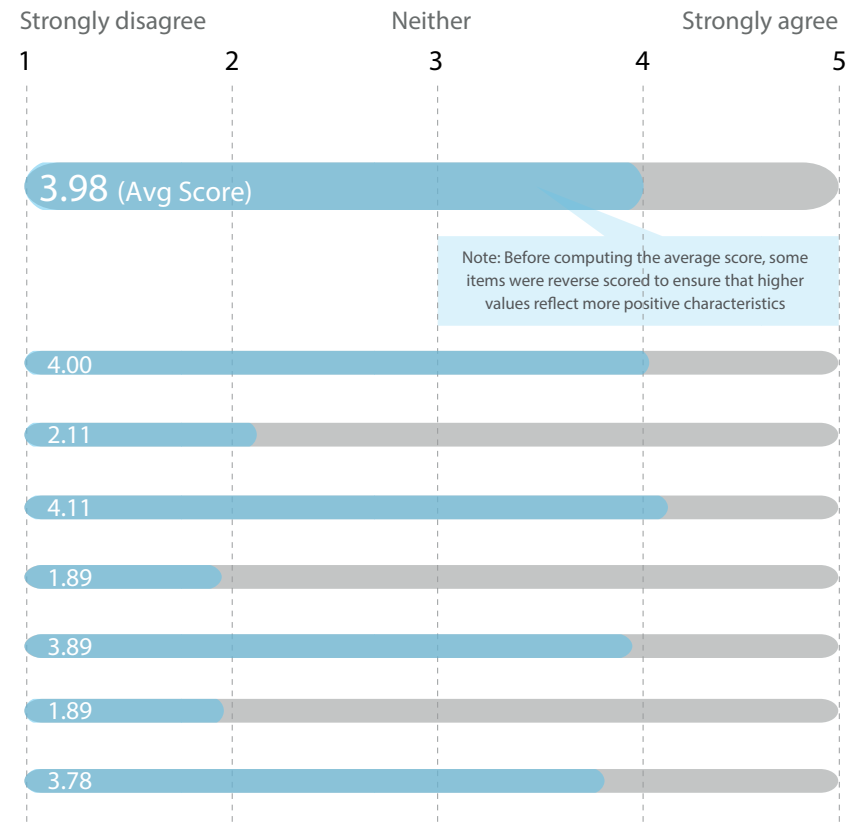
8. People in this village generally don't get along with each other

2.78

VILLAGE RESIDENT SCALE

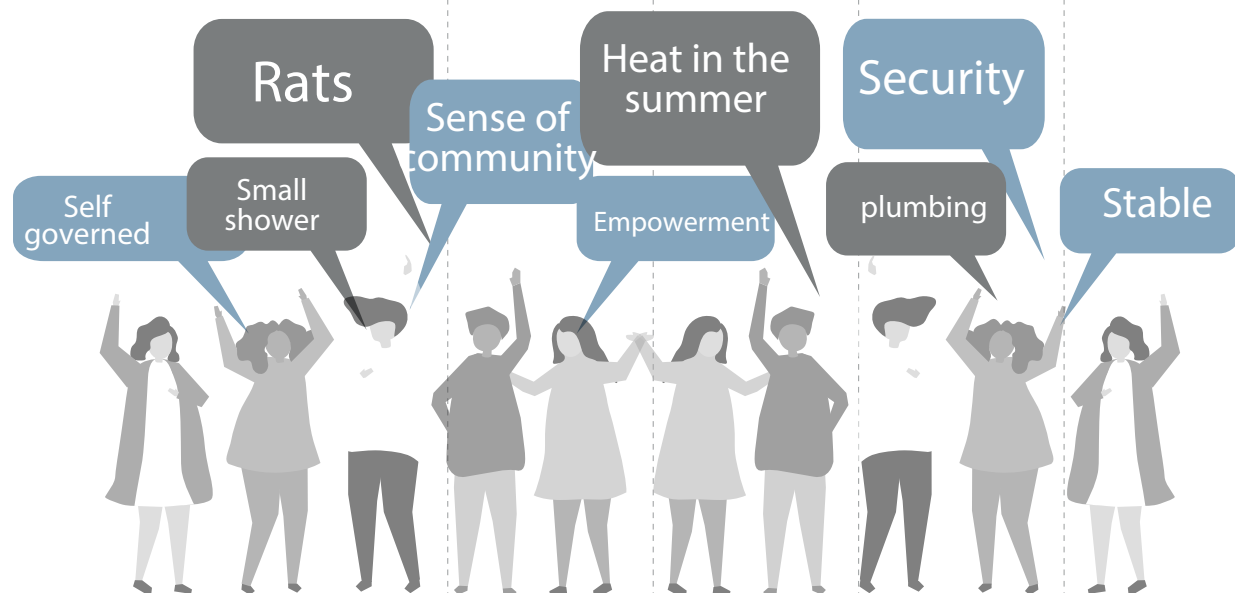


Village Neighbor Scale



VILLAGE DESCRIPTION, LIKES & DISLIKES

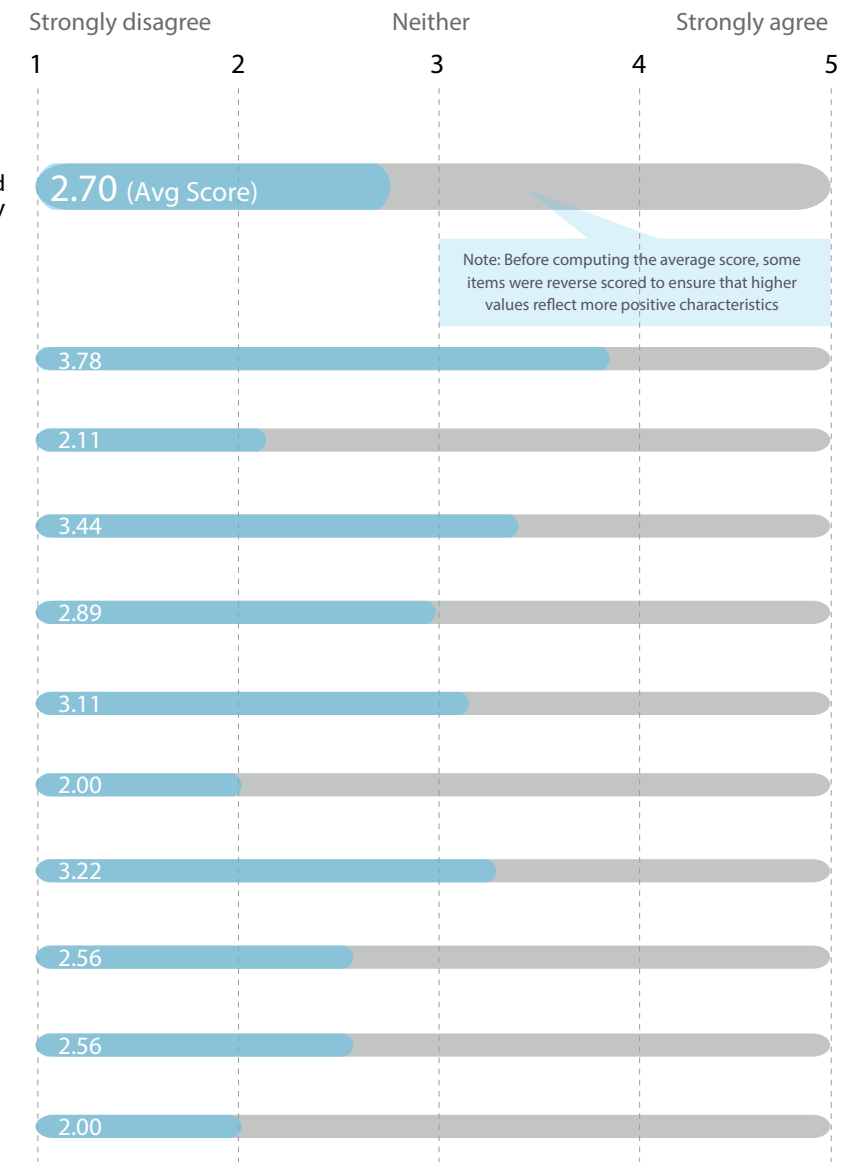
■ Likes ■ Dislikes



NEIGHBORHOOD NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY



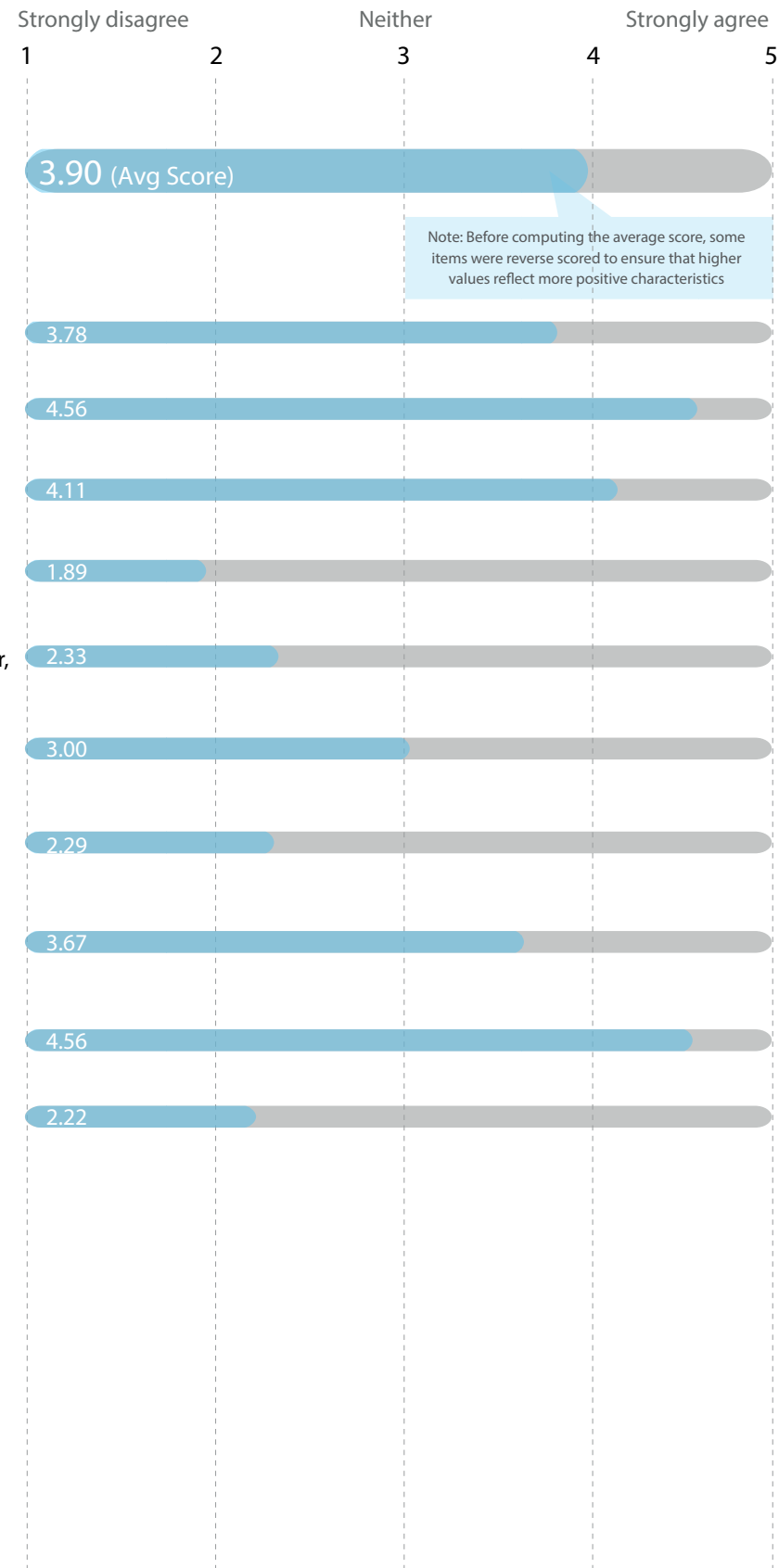
Neighborhood Quality



NEIGHBORHOOD SOCIAL CLIMATE



Neighborhood Social Climate



RESIDENTIAL SATISFACTION

1. "How satisfied are you with your pod as a place to live?"



VERY DISSATISFIED
0% (0)



NEITHER DISSATISFIED
OR SATISFIED
11.1% (1)



SATISFIED
44.4% (4)



VERY SATISFIED
44.4% (4)

2. "How satisfied are you with your neighborhood as a place to live?"



VERY DISSATISFIED
0% (0)



NEITHER DISSATISFIED
OR SATISFIED
66.7% (6)

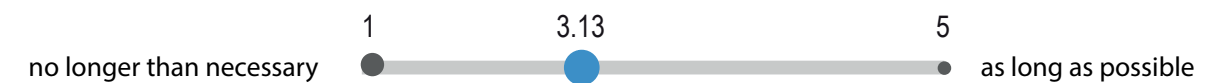


SATISFIED
22.2% (2)



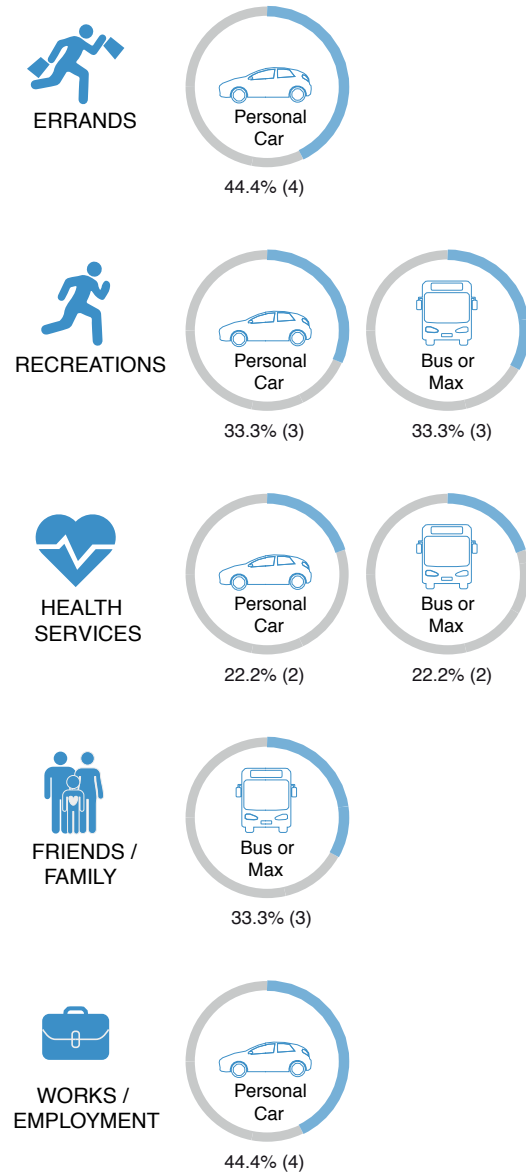
VERY SATISFIED
11.1% (1)

3. "How long do you want to live in the Village? And why?"



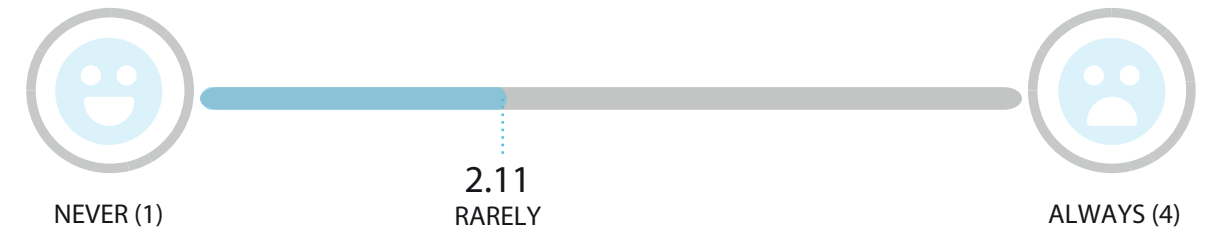
TRANSPORTATION

1. Most commonly used transportation methods in the past month.

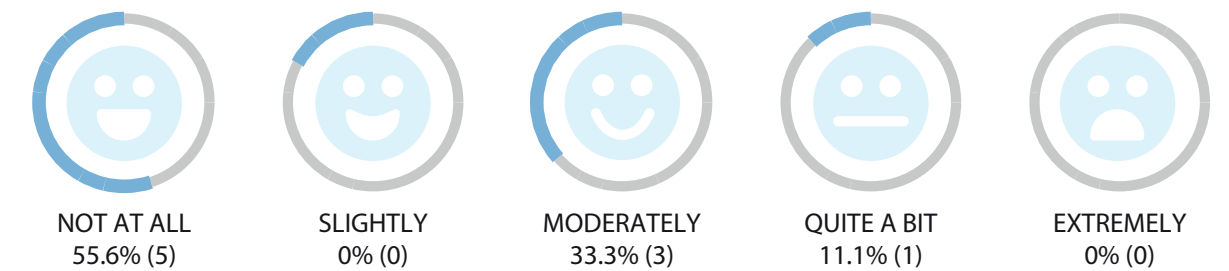


LIFE SATISFACTION AND STRESS

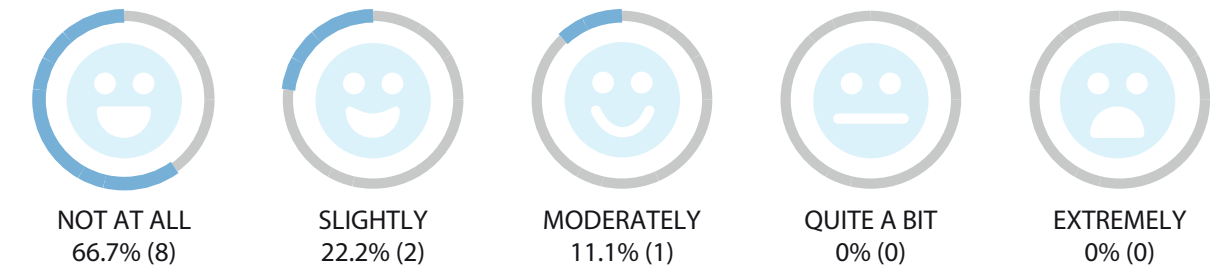
1. How often do you feel lonely on a scale of 1 (never) to 4 (always)?
On average residents said:



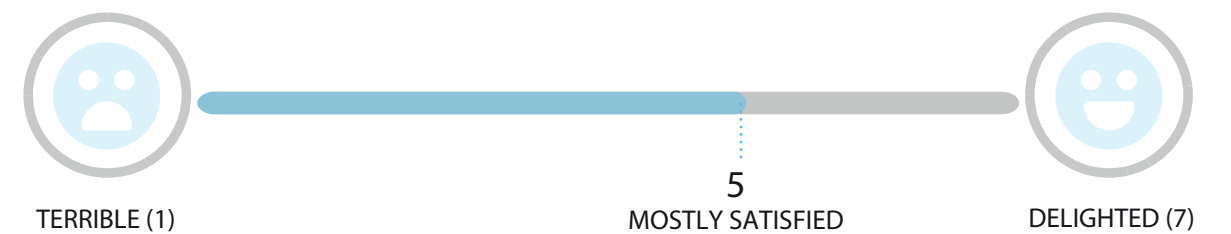
2. How much did your physical health interfere with daily activities in the last month?
The average response from residents on a scale of 1 to 5 was:



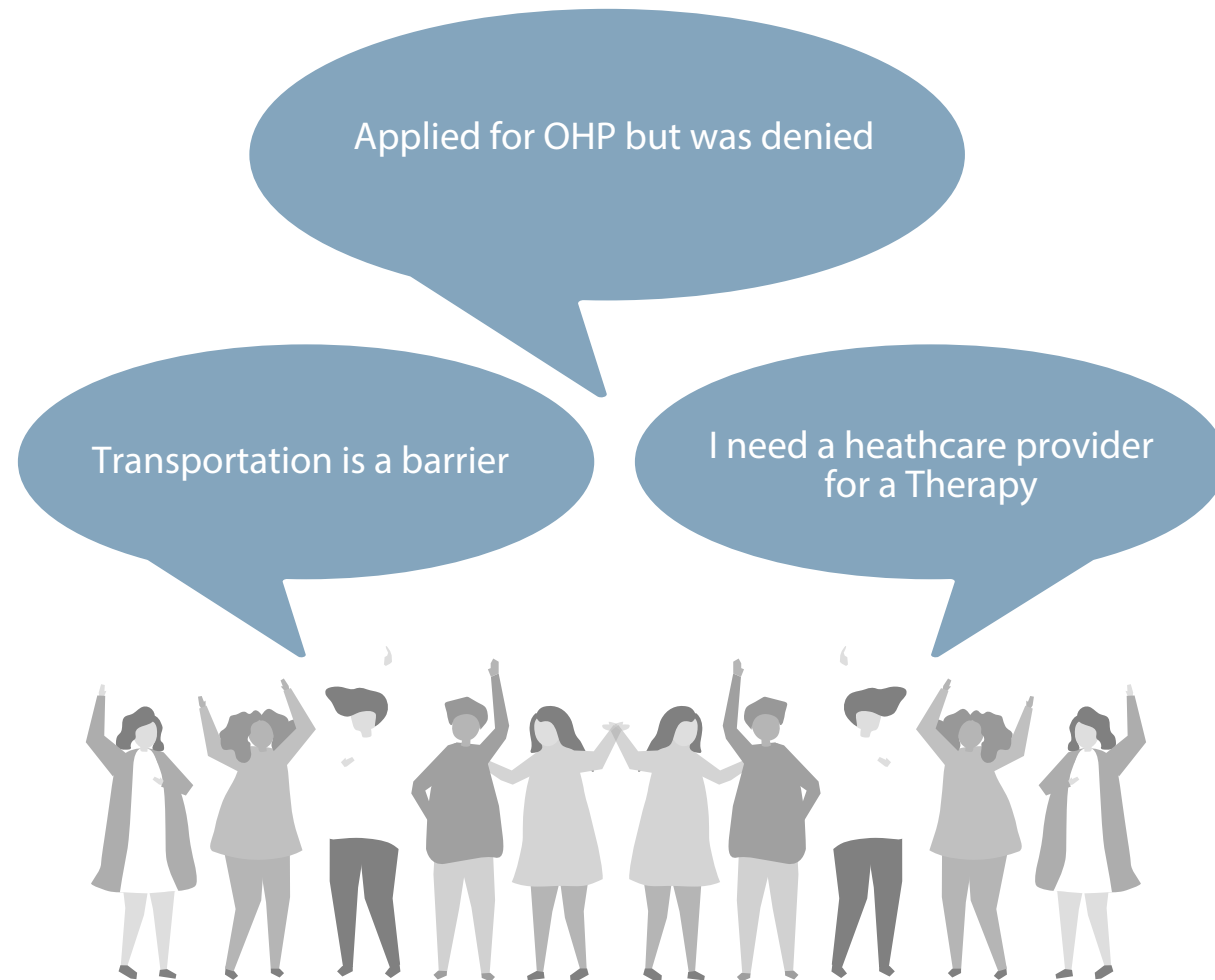
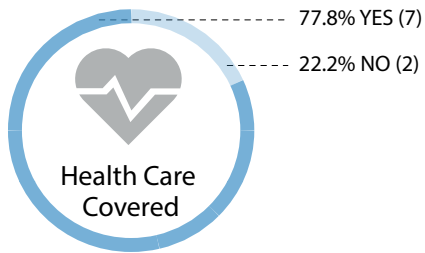
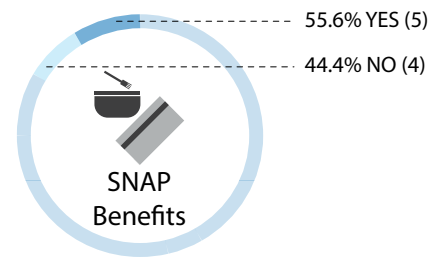
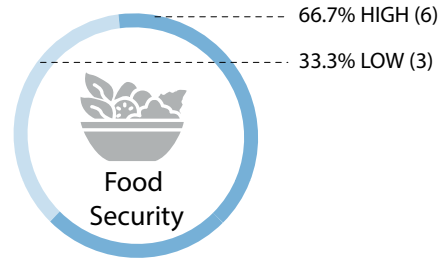
3. How much did your emotional health interfere with daily activities in the last month?
The average response from residents on a scale of 1 to 5 was:



4. How do you feel about your life overall right now?
The average response from residents on a scale of 1 (terrible) to 7 (delighted) was:



HEALTH AND BASIC NEEDS



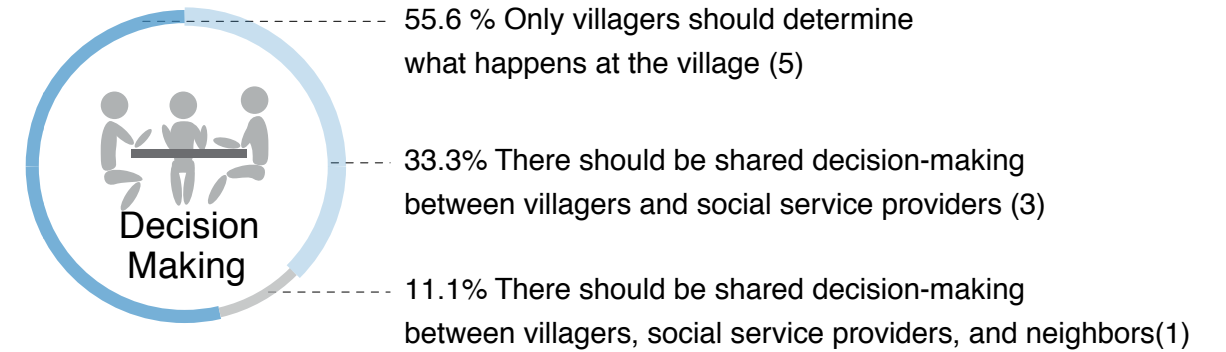
Governance and Decision Making

1. When the village has group meetings, what are the most important elements to help facilitate a productive meeting?

Elements ranked from most important to least important

(1= most important, 6= least important)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Adequate space to meet indoors	2 (22.2%)	6 (66.7%)	1 (11.1%)	-	-	-
Adequate space to meet outdoors	1 (11.1%)	3 (33.3%)	5 (55.6%)	-	-	-
Outside (non-villager) facilitators	-	-	-	2 (22.2%)	3 (33.3%)	4 (44.4%)
Established rules for the meeting	6 (66.7%)	-	1 (11.1%)	1 (11.1%)	-	1 (11.1%)
Comfortable seating	-	-	-	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	-
Food/Drinks provided at meeting	-	-	2 (22.2%)	-	3 (33.3%)	4 (44.4%)

2. How much decision-making power should village residents have?



Villager Experiences and Recommendations

I mean, they've got the food delivery here, donations. They were able to provide me with work at the market. I really didn't have to go anywhere to do anything. I mean, yeah. I mean, work was served here, dishes were served here. The bonding with people, relationships, were here. People were here, and it was safe. Yeah. It is a place where you can find the best of yourself or the worst of yourself, because everything is right here, if you really need it or want it.

Once again, that sense of empowerment. We're the ones to make that decision. We're the ones who have to follow through with that decision. If we don't want the Village ran a certain way, then we will go back before membership and we will bring it before another vote.

Knowing that if there's an issue, there's a whole community of people that will help solve it helps me feel safe.

Well, regardless of what anybody might think is a good idea, you're going to have to deal with not in my back yard, right? And then if you can satisfy that and have public transit access then you've done it.

Actually, what would really be helpful is actual indoor plumbing and instead of using the porta-lets...Especially in the winter time...That's a little cold, little cold to sit down.

